

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-30WASHINGTON POST
24 April 1985

U.S. Assails Soviet Rebuff To Agreement

Reagan Remains Interested in Talks With Gorbachev

By Lou Cannon
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House said yesterday that Soviet repudiation of an earlier agreement not to use military force against U.S. military liaison personnel in East Germany would have "adverse consequences" on super-power relations.

However, administration officials said they remained interested in a meeting next fall between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes issued a statement sharply disputing the Soviet version of a high-level U.S.-Soviet military meeting that supposedly had agreed on procedures to prevent incidents like the March 24 fatal shooting of U.S. Army Maj. Arthur D. Nicholson Jr. by a Soviet sentry in East Germany.

Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger was even blunter, saying that the Soviets were "just lying" in their account of the meeting.

The Soviets on Monday challenged the accuracy of an official U.S. statement saying that the Soviets had promised, at an April 12 meeting in Potsdam, East Germany, not to permit "use of force or weapons" against American military personnel.

The Soviet Embassy issued a statement saying that the Soviets had not renounced the right to take "legitimate steps" against intruders on intelligence missions.

Yesterday, Speakes formally responded by describing the Soviet account as a "distortion of the facts unacceptable to us."

Speakes refused to comment on the impact of the shooting controversy on a prospective meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev. But officials who spoke on condition that they not be identified said that Reagan remained committed to a meeting.

On Monday a senior Soviet official said that Gorbachev will attend the U.N. General Assembly session in New York in mid-September, and U.S. officials have speculated that a Reagan-Gorbachev meeting might be held afterward, either in New York or in Washington—not a full-blown summit, but a get-acquainted meeting of the kind U.S. officials now favor.

Yesterday, Speakes said that Reagan had not decided whether he would attend the U.N. session. This was described by other officials as an attempt to discourage summit talk and focus attention on the U.S. reply to the Soviet version of the Potsdam meeting.

The statement issued by Speakes called the shooting of the unarmed Nicholson "a senseless, unnecessary act which raises serious questions about orders provided to Soviet military personnel throughout the world."

It also supported the State Department account of the April 12 meeting between Gen. Glenn K. Otis, commander of U.S. Army Europe, and his Soviet counterpart, Gen. Mikhail M. Zaytzev.

The State Department's account of this meeting said, "We obtained agreement from the Soviets that they will not permit use of force or weapons against the members of our military mission in the future."

Weinberger, asked yesterday morning on a CBS News program about the Soviet repudiation of this account, said: "Well, they are just lying, that's all, because their general . . . made that pledge to our general . . . at the meetings in Potsdam. And if they now wish to repudiate him, they should say so."

U.S. officials said privately that the apparent change in the Soviet position and the delay in communicating it may demonstrate differences of opinion between civilian and military officials in Moscow.

Such a division has been evident in the Reagan administration, where Weinberger has taken a more militant position than State Department or White House officials in response to the shooting.

Speakes also responded to Gorbachev's assertions in a speech yesterday that U.S. negotiators in the nuclear and space arms talks at Geneva are not seriously seeking agreements.

"The United States has approached the first round of Geneva talks committed to the achievement of agreements to radically reduce nuclear arms, and to lay the basis for a more stable strategic relationship," Speakes said.